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MEDIA ADVISORY

New Brunswick can make local government more democratic and accountable: Report

The New Brunswick government’s local governance reform initiative is a nationally significant opportunity to improve local democracy.

Today, 30% of New Brunswickers do not have elected local representation. There is widespread concern about inequitable tax burdens and sprawl around the larger cities, and some local authorities are having trouble providing core services.

Responding to the Government of New Brunswick’s Green Paper released this April, researchers at Western University’s Centre for Urban Policy and Local Governance propose a way forward in a new report entitled Representative Regionalization: Toward More Equitable, Democratic, Responsive, and Efficient Local Government in New Brunswick.

“New Brunswick has a generational opportunity to reform its local government system,” says Dr. Zack Taylor, Director of the Centre for Urban Policy and Local Governance and the report’s co-author. “Faced with difficult demographic and economic pressures, the province can no longer afford to keep patching the existing system. Now is the time to act.”

The report recommends strengthening New Brunswick’s 12 Regional Service Commissions along the lines of British Columbia’s regional districts, which have successfully coordinated service delivery and land-use planning in that province since the 1960s. The report describes the history and key features of regional districts and shows how modest reforms to the Regional Service Commissions could make local governance in New Brunswick more flexible, democratic, responsive, and accountable.

“We call this approach ‘representative regionalization’ because it would strengthen local government, give democratic representation to the 30% of New Brunswickers who live outside of incorporated municipalities, and give local residents more control over the services they receive and the taxes they pay for them,” says Jon Taylor, the report’s co-author.

Past reforms which tried to amalgamate municipalities failed because they would have been highly disruptive to existing institutions. Representative regionalization would be much less disruptive because it would keep existing local governments intact while promoting more efficient and democratic decision-making at the regional level.

“Democratic decision making at the regional scale is the right move for New Brunswick,” says Dr. Taylor. “Infrastructure, land use, and services should be planned and financed at the scale of the housing or labour market. Our proposal ensures that this would be done in a way that is transparent and accountable to all residents.”

The report was written by Dr. Zack Taylor, the Director of Western University’s Centre for Urban Policy and Local Governance, and graduate student Jon Taylor (no relation).
Created in 2017, the Centre for Urban Policy and Local Governance is Western’s interdisciplinary hub for research on cities. Part of NEST, the Network on Economic and Social Trends, the Centre brings together academic researchers and practitioners to address Canadian urban problems. For more information about the Centre, visit: https://nest.uwo.ca/urbancentre/.

To download the report, visit: https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/urbancentre-reports/5/

For more information about the report, contact:

Dr. Zack Taylor  
Director, Centre for Urban Policy and Local Governance  
Western University  
London, Ontario  
E-mail: zack.taylor@uwo.ca  
Telephone: (519) 661 2111 ext. 85169